

Network Combining Wired and Non-Wired Segments

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of communication networks, and, more specifically, to the networking of devices within a building via combined wired and non-wired communication.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There is a growing need for networking within the home. This need is driven by two major factors, the increasing use of multiple data devices and the emergence of broadband services in the home.

Lately there has been an expansion in the number of homes in the USA with multiple personal computers. In addition, connectivity and networking capabilities have been added to appliances, such as refrigerators and microwave ovens. Furthermore, there is a trend toward enabling data connectivity among various multimedia (audio and video) appliances such as TV's, VCR's, receivers, and speakers. The term "data unit" as used herein denotes any device capable of generating and/or receiving data. The networking of data units enables the sharing of files and applications as well as the sharing of common peripheral devices, along with other benefits.

Another driving force behind the need for home connectivity products is the growth in the number of on-line households. As high-speed connections to information and broadband entertainment sources soar, there is a growing need to share and distribute this access among appliances within the house. These broadband services are supplied mainly by three types of service providers:

1. Telco's, via xDSL connections (currently ADSL, to be followed by VDSL).
2. CATV. Currently via Cable-Modem, to be followed by digital Set-Top-Box.
3. Wireless connections, such as Satellite, LMDS, WLL, and others.

Communication within a home can be classified into two types: wired and non-wired. These are covered below:

Wired Communication

Wired communication requires using at least two distinct electrical conductors. The wiring can be new wiring installed and dedicated for data communication within the home, such as installing structured wiring such as Category 5 type, used in Ethernet IEEE802 networks. However, the installation of a new wiring structure within a home is labor-intensive, complex, and expensive. Alternatively, existing home wiring, which was previously installed for a specific purpose, can be used for data communication without substantially affecting or degrading the original service. Existing wiring includes telephone wiring, power line wiring, and cable TV wiring. These are reviewed below.

For all wired configurations, the present invention relies upon electrically-conducting lines which may be pre-existing within a building, which have at least two distinct electrical conductors, and which are capable of transporting data communication signals. Furthermore, the

present invention relies upon suitable outlets, to which the electrically-conducting lines are coupled, and which are capable of connecting to external devices.

Telephone Wiring

5 In-home telephone service usually employs two or four wires, and is accessed via telephone outlets into which the telephone sets are connected.

Figure 1 shows the wiring configuration of a prior-art telephone system 10 for a residence or other building, wired with a telephone line 5. Residence telephone line 5 consists of single wire pair which connects to a
10 junction-box 16, which in turn connects to a Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) 18 via a cable 17, terminating in a public switch 19, which establishes and enables telephony from one telephone to another. The term "analog telephony" as used herein denotes traditional analog low-frequency audio voice signals typically under 3KHz, sometimes referred to as "POTS"
15 ("Plain Old Telephone Service"), whereas the term "telephony" in general denotes any kind of telephone service, including digital service such as Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN). The term "high-frequency" as used herein denotes any frequency substantially above such analog telephony audio frequencies, such as that used for data. ISDN typically uses
20 frequencies not exceeding 100KHz (typically the energy is concentrated around 40Khz). The term "telephone line" as used herein denotes electrically-conducting lines which are intended primarily for the carrying and distribution of analog telephony, and includes, but is not limited to, such electrically-conducting lines which may be pre-existing within a
25 building and which may currently provide analog telephony service. The term "telephone device" as used herein denotes, without limitation, any apparatus for telephony (including both analog telephony and ISDN), as well as any device using telephony signals, such as fax, voice-modem, and so forth.

Junction box 16 is used to separate the in-home circuitry from the PSTN and is used as a test facility for troubleshooting as well as for wiring new in the home. A plurality of telephones 13a and 13b connects to telephone lines 5 via a plurality of telephone outlets 11a, 11b, 11c, and 11d. 5 Each outlet has a connector (often referred to as a "jack"), denoted in Figure 1 as 12a, 12b, 12c, and 12d, respectively. In North-America, RJ-11 is commonly used. Each outlet may be connected to a telephone unit via a connector (often referred to as a "plug"), denoted in Figure 1 (for the two telephone units 13a and 13b illustrated) as 14a and 14b, respectively. It is 10 also important to note that lines 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d, and 5e are electrically the same paired conductors.

While network 10 exhibits serial or daisy-chained topology wherein the wiring is serialized from an outlet the next one only, other topologies such as star, tree or any arbitrary topology may also exist. However, the 15 telephone wiring system within a residence is always composed of wired media: two or four copper wires, and several outlets which provides direct access for connecting to these wires.

There is a requirement for simultaneously using the existing telephone infrastructure for both telephone and data networking. In this 20 way, the task of establishing a new local area network in a home or other building is simplified, because there would be no additional wires to install. U.S. Patent 4,766,402 to Crane (hereinafter referred to as "Crane") teaches a way to form LAN over two-wire telephone lines, but without the telephone service.

25 As an another example, relevant prior-art in this field is disclosed in U.S. Patent 5,896,443 to Dichter (hereinafter referred to as "Dichter"). Dichter suggests a method and apparatus for applying frequency domain / division multiplexing (FDM) technique for residential telephone wiring, enabling simultaneously carrying telephone and data communication

signals. The bandwidth enabled by the wiring is split into a low-frequency band capable of carrying an analog telephony signal and a high-frequency band capable of carrying data communication signals. In such mechanism, the telephone service is not affected, while data communication capability is provided over existing telephone wiring within a home.

The concept of frequency domain / division multiplexing (FDM) is well-known in the art, and provides means of splitting the bandwidth carried by a wire into a low-frequency band capable of carrying an analog telephony signal and a high-frequency band capable of carrying data communication or other signals. Such a mechanism is described, for example, in U.S. Patent 4,785,448 to Reichert *et al.* (hereinafter referred to as "Reichert"). Also widely used are xDSL systems, primarily Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Loop (ADSL) systems.

The Dichter network is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows a network 20 serving both telephones and providing a local area network of data units. Data Terminal Equipment (DTE) units 24a, 24b, and 24c are connected to the local area network via Data Communication Equipment (DCE) units 23a, 23b, and 23c, respectively. Examples of Data Communication Equipment include modems, line drivers, line receivers, and transceivers (the term "transceiver" herein denotes a combined transmitter and receiver). DCE units 23a, 23b, and 23c are respectively connected to high pass filters (HPF) 22a, 22b, and 22c. The HPF's allow the DCE units access to the high-frequency band carried by telephone-line 5. In a first embodiment (not shown in Figure 2), telephones 13a, 13b, and 13c are directly connected to telephone line 5 via connectors 14a, 14b, and 14c, respectively. However, in order to avoid interference to the data network caused by the telephones, in a second embodiment (shown in Figure 2) low pass filters (LPF's) 21a, 21b, and 21c are added to telephones 13a, 13b, and 13c from telephone line 5. Furthermore, a low pass filter is

also connected to Junction Box **16**, in order to filter noises induced from or to the PSTN wiring **17**. It is important to note that lines **5a**, **5b**, **5c**, **5d**, and **5e** are electrically the same paired conductors.

Additional prior-art patents in this field can be found under US Class
5 379/093.08, which relates to carrying data over telephone wiring without
any modifications made to the telephone wiring (e.g. wires and outlets). US
Patent 5,841,360 and US patent applications 09/123,486 and 09/357,379 to
the present inventor are the first to suggest modifying the telephone wiring,
by means of splitting the wiring into distinct segments, each of which
10 connects two telephone outlets. In this way, the network is modified from
'bus' topology into multiple 'point-to-point' segments, enabling superior
communication characteristics.

Part of such a network **30** is shown in Figure 3, describing outlets
31a and **31b**, substituting outlets **11** of Figures 1 and 2. The telephone
15 wiring **5** is split into distinct segments **5a**, **5b** and **5c**. Low-Pass Filter (LPF)
and High-Pass Filters (HPF) are coupled to each wire segment end, in order
to split between the telephony and the data signals. As shown in Figure 3,
LPF's **21b** and **21c** are attached to each end of wiring segment **5b**. The
LPF's are designed to allow passing of the telephony signals, and are
20 connected together thus offering a continuous path for the telephony
signals. Access to the telephony signals is made via connectors **12a** and **12b**
in the outlets, into which telephone devices **13a** and **13b** are connected via
connectors **14a** and **14b** respectively. Thus, the telephony service is fully
retained. The data signals, carried in the high part of the spectrum, are
25 accessed via HPF's **26a** and **22b**, coupled to each end of the telephone wire
segment **5b**. HPF's **22a** and **26b** are connected to the ends of the wire
segments **5a** and **5c** respectively. Each HPF is connected to a modem **23**
and **27**, which transmit and receive data signals over the telephone wiring.
Modems **23a**, **27a**, **23b**, and **27b** are connected to HPF's **22a**, **26a**, **22b** and

26b respectively. Data units 24a and 24b are connected to the outlets 31a and 31b respectively, via a connector (not shown in the Figure) in the outlet. The data units are coupled via DTE interface in the outlet. Outlets 31a and 31b comprise DTE interfaces 29a and 29b respectively. The three
5 data streams in each outlet, two from each modem and one from the DTE, are handled by an adapter 28a and an adapter 28b, which serve outlets 31a and 31b, respectively. While Figure 3 describes an embodiment wherein all the components for the relevant functions are housed within the outlet, other embodiments are also possible, wherein only some of the components
10 for these functions are contained within the outlet.

Power Lines

It is possible to transmit data over wiring used for distribution of electrical power within the home, which is normally at a frequency of 50 or 60 Hz. Access to the power is available via power outlets distributed around
15 the house. Such wiring consists of two wires (phase and neutral) or three wires (phase, neutral, and ground).

FDM techniques, as well as others, are used for enabling data communication over power lines. Many prior-art patents in this field can be found in US Class 340/310.

Cable Television Lines

It is also possible to transmit data over wiring used for the distribution of television signals within the home. Such wiring usually is coaxial cable.

Both power line and cable television wiring systems resemble the
25 telephone line structure described in Figure 1. The wiring system is based on conductors, usually located in the walls, and access to these wires is obtained via dedicated outlets, each housing a connector connected directly to the wires. Common to all these systems, is the fact that the wiring was installed for a dedicated purpose (telephone, power, or cable TV signal

distribution). Wherever one of these existing wiring systems is used for carrying data, it is desirable that the original service (telephony, power, or television signal distribution) be unaffected. Dedicated modems are used for carrying data over the media concurrently with the original service.

5 When using existing wiring, specific wired modems are normally required for communicating over the electrically-conducting lines, and access to the electrically-conducting lines is provided via the relevant outlets. Using electrically-conducting lines as the communication media allows for high bandwidth, and provides robust and cost-effective
10 communication. In addition, communication over large distances is possible, which in most cases enables coverage of the whole house, thereby guaranteeing communication from any outlet to another within the house.

 Such networks, however, require data units to be connected to the outlets, usually by means of a cable from the data unit to a suitable nearby
15 outlet. This makes the connection complex and hard-to-use, requires the data unit to be in proximity to an appropriate outlet, and impairs mobility for some data units within the house.

Non-Wired Communication

 Non-wired solutions for in-home data networking use waves
20 propagated without an electrically-conducting medium. Three main techniques are commonly used:

1. *Radio Frequency (RF)*. Transmission of data between data units can be accomplished with radio frequency electromagnetic signals. As an example, IEEE802.11 can be used.
- 25 2. *Light*. Transmission of data between data units can be accomplished with light in the visible or non-visible spectrum. Currently, the most popular is infrared (IR) based communication. Most such systems require 'line-of-sight' placement of the communicating data units.

3. *Sound.* Transmission of data between data units can be accomplished with sound waves, either in the audio spectrum (20-20,000Hz), or inaudible spectrum (ultrasonic, above 20,000Hz; or infrasonic, below 20Hz).

5 It is noted that although light and radio waves are both electromagnetic phenomena, they occupy different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum and have significantly different characteristics for purposes of the present invention. Thus, light and radio waves are herein treated as distinct physical phenomena.

10 An example of a non-wired data network 40 is shown in Figure 4. Two data units 41a and 41b are shown, into which non-wired transceivers 42a and 42b are respectively coupled. The non-wired transceivers 42a and 42b communicate over a space 43 without any electrically-conducting medium. If RF transmission is used, the transceivers are RF transceivers, and the communication over space 43 is based on the propagation of radio frequency electromagnetic waves. Similarly, in the case of light-based communication, transceivers 42a and 42b utilize light emitters (e.g. LEDs) and light detectors (e.g. photoelectric cell), and the communication over space 43 relies on the propagation of light. Likewise, in the case of sound-based communication over space 43, the transceivers use microphones and speakers, and the communication relies on the propagation of sound waves through the air in the space 43.

25 Since these solutions do not require any physical connection such as cable, they provide both ease-of-use and mobility. However, such non-wired solutions are effective over short distances only. Furthermore, most of the non-wired solutions cannot easily pass through walls and other such obstructions, owing to the attenuation to the signals. Hence, such techniques are suitable for communication within a single room, but are not suitable for communication between the rooms of a home or other building.

There is thus a widely recognized need for, and it would be highly advantageous to have, a means for implementing a data networking in-home between data units, wherein such data units can be networked within a home or other building, while providing mobility and ease of use.

5 This goal is met by the present invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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The module coupling both segments, or any of the components of the module, can be fully integrated into the outlet, partially integrated into the outlet, or externally coupled to it.

Therefore, according to the present invention there is provided a
5 local area network within a building for transporting data among a plurality
of data units, the local area network including at least one wired segment
and at least one non-wired segment, wherein the at least one wired segment
includes: (a) at least one electrically-conducting line within the building, the
electrically-conducting line having at least two conductors and operative to
10 transport data communication signals; (b) at least two outlets, each
operative for coupling to the electrically-conducting line; and (c) at least
one wired modem coupled to the electrically-conducting line, operative to
communicate over the electrically-conducting line; (d) and wherein the at
least one non-wired segment is operative to communicating data without
15 electrically-conducting media and includes at least one non-wired modem,
wherein at least one of the outlets couples a wired segment to a non-wired
segment, and wherein the at least one electrically-conducting line is
furthermore operative for concurrently distributing a service other than the
transport of data communication signals.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is herein described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 shows a common prior art telephone line wiring
5 configuration for a residence or other building.

Figure 2 shows a first prior art local area network based on telephone line wiring for a residence or other building.

Figure 3 shows a second prior art local area network based on telephone line wiring for a residence or other building.

10 Figure 4 shows a prior art non-wired communication network.

Figure 5 shows modules according to the present invention.

Figure 6 shows a local area network according to the present invention, wherein telephone wiring used for the wired segment and radio-frequency communication for the non-wired segment.

15 Figure 7 shows a second embodiment of a local area network based on telephone lines as the wired segment and radio frequency communication for the non-wired segment.

Figure 8 shows a kit for upgrading existing electrically-conducting lines to support a network according to the present invention.

20 DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The principles and operation of a network according to the present invention may be understood with reference to the drawings and the accompanying description. The drawings and descriptions are conceptual only. In actual practice, a single component can implement one or more
25 functions; alternatively, each function can be implemented by a plurality of components and circuits. In the drawings and descriptions, identical

reference numerals indicate those components which are common to different embodiments or configurations.

The invention is based on a wired / non-wired network adapter module (hereinafter referred to as "module"). A functional description of such a module 50 is shown in Figure 5. The module comprises a physical port 54 for connecting to the wired network. The communication with the wired network is carried by wired transceiver 51. Wired transceiver port 54 and transceiver 51 are dependent upon the type of wired network. Interfacing a telephone line-based network requires a telephone line transceiver, while connecting to a power line network requires a power line dedicated modem. Additionally, the connection to the wired network may require specific means in order to meet regulatory and safety requirements, as well as specific means for ensuring that the basic service (e.g. telephony service, power distribution) is not substantially degraded or affected.

The non-wired segment interfaces via a port 55. Port 55 communicates without an electrically-conducting medium. Communication with this non-wired segment is handled by a non-wired modem / transceiver 53. The term "non-wired modem" herein denotes any device capable of data communication without requiring an electrically-conducting medium. The data to and from the wired segment and the data to and from the non-wired segment are handled by a protocol adapter 52. Protocol adapter 52 may serve as a transparent unit, acting as a repeater / regenerator, dealing with the physical layer only of the OSI model. However, higher layers can also be handled by the protocol adapter 52. In such a case, the protocol adapter will function as a bridge, router, gateway or any other adaptation mechanism as required.

Other facilities of module 50 may contain logic, control, processing, storage, power-supply and other components not shown in Figure 5. The communication supported by module 50 can be simplex (unidirectional,

either from the wired towards the non-wired segment or *vice-versa*), half-duplex, or full duplex. A module 50a connects a telephone line network segment to an RF network segment. Module 50a employs a telephone line modem 51a as the wired network interface, a radio-
5 frequency modem 53a as an interface to the non-wired network segment, and a protocol adapter 52a. A module 50b is an embodiment of the present invention, in which the telephone line transceiver can be implemented by a high-pass filter (HPF) 22a and data terminal equipment (DCE) 23a, as also used by Dichter as discussed previously.

10 Figure 6 shows an embodiment of a network 60 according to the present invention that includes wired and non-wired segments. The wired segment is based on telephone wiring 5 within a building as described in Figure 1. While outlets 11b and 11c are unchanged, outlets 11a and 11d are replaced by outlets 61d and 61a, respectively, containing modules 50d and
15 50e respectively. Basic telephone service is retained by employing low-pass filters (LPF) 21d and 21a in outlets 61d and 61a respectively. The LPF's are coupled to telephone connectors 12d and 12a respectively, enabling connection of telephone devices. This is illustrated by a telephone 13a connected by connector 14a to connector 12a in outlet 61a. A Dichter-type
20 data communication network is established by connecting data terminal equipment (DTE) via a modem and HPF, as illustrated by DTE 24b connected to DCE 23b, which is coupled to HPF 22b, which is in turn directly coupled to telephone wiring 5 via connector 12b in outlet 11b.

The non-wired part of network 60 is based on radio frequency
25 transmission, utilizing a pair of RF transceivers 53 (Figure 5). As shown in Figure 6, DTE's 24d and 24a are coupled to RF transceivers 53c and 53b, respectively. In turn, each such RF transceiver communicates with RF transceivers 53d and 53a, respectively, which are integrated within outlets 61d and 61a, respectively.

Integrating the wired and non-wired segments of the network is accomplished by modules 50d and 50e, each of which is illustrated by module 50c in Figure 5. Modules 50d and 50e are integrated within outlets 61d and 61a, respectively. Each such module interfaces the wired segment
5 of the network by a telephone modem. Each such modem contains a high-pass filter 22 and DCE 23, as described previously for a Dichter-type network. Interfacing to the non-wired segment of network 60 is performed via an RF transceiver, wherein modules 50d and 50e comprises RF transceivers 53d and 53e respectively. Protocols and data conversion
10 between both segments are performed by adapter 52 (Figure 5), wherein adapters 52d and 52e are integrated within modules 50d and 50e respectively.

Network 60 allows DTE's 24d, 24b and 24a to communicate among themselves. While DTE 24b is connected to the network via a wired
15 connection, DTE's 24d and 24a can communicate in a non-wired manner. While Figure 6 illustrates a single DTE connected by wires and two DTE's connected without wires, it is obvious that any number of DTEs of each type can be connected. Furthermore, while in network 60 each outlet supports a single wired or non-wired DTE connection, other implementa-
20 tions can also be supported. For example, an outlet can provide one or more wired connections simultaneously with one or more non-wired connections.

While Figure 6 illustrates the case where module 50 is integrated in an outlet 61, embodiments of the present invention also include those wherein the module is external to the outlet. Similarly, selective parts of a
25 module may be integrated within an outlet while other parts are external. In all cases, of course, appropriate electrical and mechanical connection between the module and the outlet are required.

A network outlet is physically similar in size, shape, and overall appearance to a standard outlet, so that a network outlet can be substituted

for a standard outlet in the building wall. No changes are required in the overall telephone line layout or configuration.

Network 60 provides clear advantages over hitherto proposed networks. For example, DTEs (e.g. PC's) located in different rooms can
5 interconnect without the need to use any wires. A radio-frequency transceiver in each DTE communicates with the nearest outlet, and the outlets communicate between rooms over the telephone wiring media.

The invention can equally well be applied to the prior art wired network illustrated in Figure 3. Figure 7 shows part of a network 70. Outlet
10 31a represents a prior-art network outlet. In order to interface to the non-wired network segments, an outlet 71 according to the present invention must be used. With the exception of RF transceiver 53a within outlet 71, which communicates with RF transceiver 53b connected to a DTE 24a, outlet 71 is similar to outlet 31a. In this embodiment, the module includes
15 two telephone line modems 23b and 27b, a three-port adapter 72 (for the two wired ports and the single non-wired port), and RF transceiver 53a. The advantages offered by the prior-art topology apply also for this configuration.

While the present invention has been described above for the case
20 where the wired media is based on a telephone line system and includes telephone wires and telephone outlets, the present invention can equally well be applied to other wired systems such as those based on power and cable television signal distribution. In the case of an electrical power distribution system, the electrical wires and outlets employed for power
25 distribution in the house are used. Similarly, cable television wiring and outlets can also be used. In all cases, it may be necessary to retain the basic service for which the wiring systems were installed: telephony service, electrical power distribution, or television signals. This is usually achieved by adding the appropriate circuitry to separate the data communication

network from the basic service, as well as to avoid interference of any kind between the two roles currently employing the same wiring. For example, the LPF's 21a, 21b, 21c, and 21d; and HPF's 22a, 22b, 26a, and 26b (Figure 7) serve the role of separating the telephony service from the data communication network and vice-versa.

While the present invention has been described above for the case wherein the non-wired communication is accomplished by radio-frequency transmission, the present invention can be equally applied to other types of non-wired communication, such as:

1. Non-wired communication accomplished by other forms of electromagnetic transmission. Electromagnetic waves in various parts of the electromagnetic spectrum can be used for communication. For example, low-frequency electromagnetic radiation can be used to transmit audio-frequency signals over short distances without a carrier. Radio-frequency transmission is a special case of this general electromagnetic transmission. As noted previously, light is also a special case of electromagnetic radiation, but is herein treated separately because of the characteristics of light are distinctly different from those of electromagnetic transmission in other usable parts of the electromagnetic spectrum.
2. Non-wired communication accomplished by light. Either visible or non-visible light wavelength can be used for such transmission. As previously noted, currently, the most popular is infrared (IR) based communication. Most such systems require substantially 'line-of-sight' access.
3. Non-wired communication accomplished by sound. Either audible sound (20-20,000Hz band), or inaudible sound (ultrasonic, above 20,000Hz; or infrasonic, below 20Hz).

In addition to the described data communication function, the network according to the present invention can also be used for control (e.g. home automation), sensing, audio, or video applications, and the communication can also utilize analog signals (herein denoted by the term
5 "analog communication"). For example, a video signal can be transmitted in analog form via the network.

Upgrade Kit

The present invention also contemplates a kit for upgrading existing electrically-conducting lines to support a network as described above.
10 Figure 8 illustrates an embodiment of such a kit containing an outlet 132 and an outlet 134 and installation instructions 136. Outlet 132 has connection 144 for coupling to a wired segment and mounting points such as a flange 146 for installing in the building walls. Outlet 132 also has a jack 138 and a jack 140 for connecting to external devices via cables, and a
15 transducer 142 for connecting to external data units via a non-wired segment. Within outlet 132 is a module according to the present invention, as previously described and illustrated in Figure 5. In one embodiment, transducer 142 is a radio frequency transceiver. In another embodiment, transducer 142 is a combined light-emitting diode and photocell receiver. In
20 still another embodiment, transducer 142 is a combined speaker and microphone. Likewise, in one embodiment, jack 138 is a telephone jack. In another embodiment, jack 138 is an electrical power socket. In still another embodiment, jack 138 is a cable television jack. In one embodiment, jack 140 is a data jack. The embodiment of the kit illustrated in Figure 8 has two
25 outlets, outlet 132 and outlet 134, which are illustrated as substantially identical. However, in another embodiment, the kit contains only outlet 132. In still another embodiment, outlet 134 does not contain a transducer. Other variations are also possible in different embodiments.

It will also be appreciated that the outlet and the adapter module may be provided as separate components for use in upgrading existing wiring of a building to support a local area network having at least one wired segment and at least one non-wired segment. They may likewise find independent use for further expanding a hybrid network that has previously been upgraded according to the invention. Such an outlet is provided with a first coupler for coupling the outlet to the at least one non-wired segment, and a second coupler for coupling the outlet to the existing wiring via an adapter module. The adapter module may be either fully or partially integrated within the outlet.

A method for upgrading existing electrically-conducting lines within a building to support a network according to the present invention involves:

- (a) providing a wired modem;
- (b) providing a non-wired modem;
- (c) providing an adapter for handling the data communications between a wired segment and a non-wired segment; and
- (d) providing an outlet, and
- (e) equipping the outlet with the wired modem, the non-wired modem, and the adapter.

While the invention has been described with respect to a limited number of embodiments, it will be appreciated that many variations, modifications and other applications of the invention may be made.